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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 648

[Docket No. 140117052-4402-02]

RIN 0648-XD985

Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Summer Flounder Fishery; Quota Transfer

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; quota transfer.

SUMMARY: NMFS announces that the State of North Carolina is transferring a portion of its 2015 commercial summer flounder quota to the Commonwealth of Virginia. These quota adjustments are necessary to comply with the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan quota transfer provision. This announcement is intended to inform the public of the revised commercial quota for each state involved.

DATES: Effective June 29, 2015, through December 31, 2015.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Reid Lichwell, Fishery Management Specialist, 978-281-9112.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Regulations governing the summer flounder fishery are in 50 CFR 648.100 through 50 CFR 648.110. These regulations require annual specification of a

commercial quota that is apportioned among the coastal states from North Carolina through Maine. The process to set the annual commercial quota and the percent allocated to each state are described in § 648.10(c)(1)(i).

The final rule implementing Amendment 5 to the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan provided a mechanism for summer flounder quota to be transferred from one state to another (December 17, 1993; 58 FR 65936). Two or more states, under mutual agreement and with the concurrence of the NMFS Greater Atlantic Regional Administrator, can transfer or combine summer flounder commercial quota under § 648.102(c)(2). The Regional Administrator is required to consider the criteria in § 648.102(c)(2)(i) when evaluating requests for quota transfers or combinations.

North Carolina has agreed to transfer 7,340 lb (3,329 kg) of its 2015 commercial summer flounder quota to Virginia. This transfer was prompted by landings of a North Carolina vessel that was granted safe harbor in Virginia due to mechanical failure on May 3, 2015. As a result of these landings, a quota transfer is necessary to account for an increase in Virginia landings that would have otherwise accrued against the North Carolina quota.

The Regional Administrator has determined that the criteria set forth in § 648.102(c)(2)(i) have been met. The transfer is consistent with the criteria because it will not preclude the overall annual quota from being fully harvested, the transfer addresses an unforeseen variation or contingency in the fishery, and the transfer is consistent with the objectives of the FMP and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The revised summer flounder commercial quotas for calendar year 2015 are: Virginia, 2,401,568 lb (1,089,330 kg); and North Carolina, 2,976,243 lb (1,350,001 kg).

Classification

This action is taken under 50 CFR part 648 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 25, 2015

Jennifer M. Wallace,
Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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